

By Kevin Diaz and Jeremy Herb, *Star Tribune*

WASHINGTON - Peter Erlinder is coming home.

Erlinder, the St. Paul law professor arrested in Rwanda last month, was granted bail in court Thursday based on health concerns. He can return to the U.S. once his lawyers file the necessary paperwork, including a Rwanda legal address where he can be contacted, U.S. State Department officials told members of Congress.

The Rwandan judge cited Erlinder's health problems in the ruling, as Erlinder was hospitalized again Wednesday - the fourth time since his arrest. He remained there during Thursday's ruling, according to the Rwanda News Agency.

Erlinder's wife Masako Usui said she was still in disbelief moments after she heard the news Thursday morning. "My first reaction was, what does it mean?" she said. "I want to believe it. I want to see him."

The family heard directly from the embassy in Kigali that Erlinder had been granted bail. They still are unsure how long it will be until Erlinder can leave the country or whether the charges against him will be dropped, Usui said. If the charges stand, however, Usui said the family will still want to clear Erlinder's name.

"I hope it's done with Rwanda, but if it's not, we should still keep fighting against the charges," she said. "I'm still in a fighting mood."

The U.S. State Department was "pleased" that the Rwandan court released Erlinder, said spokesman Darby Holladay. U.S. embassy officials attended Thursday's hearing, Holladay said.

Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., and Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., said they were notified of the decision Thursday morning by the State Department. Bill Harper, McCollum's chief of staff who has been working with the family, said, "We look forward to him returning to Minnesota."

